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ABSTRACT

As part of a series dealing with national trends in women's education, this monograph examines the development of women's studies programs at the community college level and provides suggestions to increase their impact. The monograph first discusses the changes in the community college population, for example, in the male/female ratio and in students' ages, goals, and needs. It then discusses the potential role of women's studies in developing the self-confidence and economic and social position of increasing numbers of older, part-time, female students. A review of the literature is then presented, focusing on sources of information: definitions of women's programs, women's re-entry programs, and women's studies programs and courses; the lack of quantitative data; and articles on students' needs and problems. This is followed by an examination of the present status of women's studies programs as determined by a survey of 15 community colleges and interviews with eight women's studies program directors. Information is provided on the political factors involved in establishing Women's Studies Centers, the instructional materials and kinds of assistance needed, instructor role, governance, and goals. Recommendations for improvement are then presented, suggesting the articulation of a national policy of support and research to collect basic statistical data and information on the impact of women's studies courses. A bibliography is provided. (JP)

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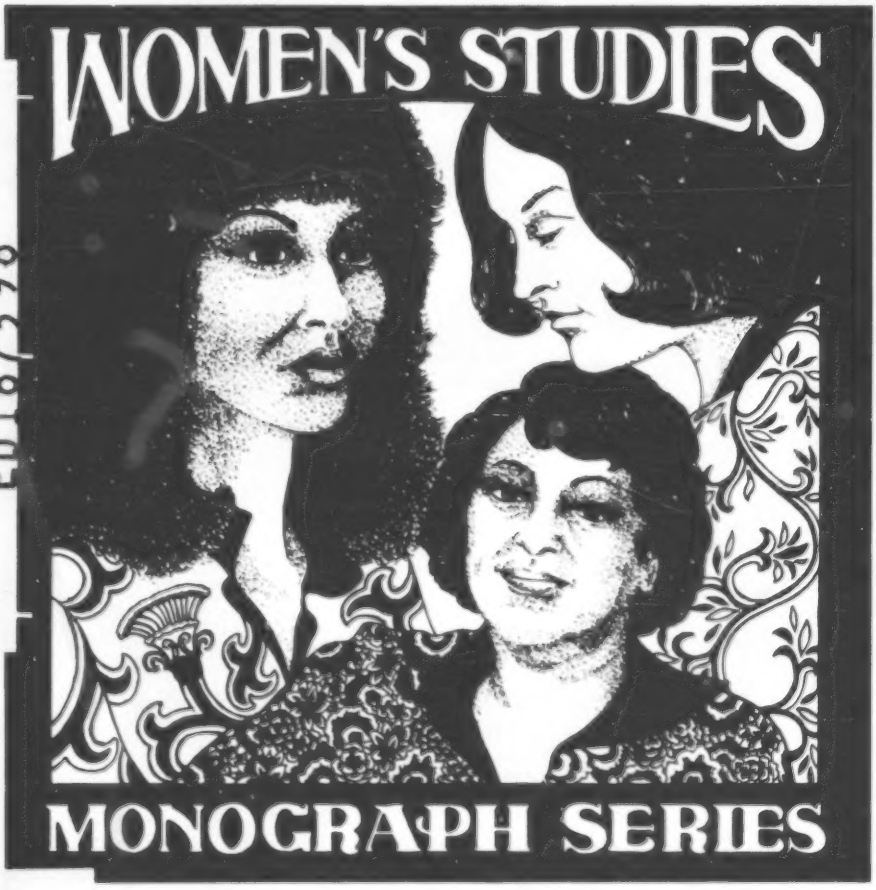

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Women's Studies in the Community College

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WOMEN'S STUDIES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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PREFACE

This monograph is part of a series of eight, commissioned by the National Institute of Education (NIE), following recommendations presented in Seven Years Later: Women's Studies Programs in 1976 by Florence Howe.

Seven Years Later was commissioned and published by the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs. It was the first federally financed investigation of women's studies. Howe visited and reported on 15 mature women's studies programs, in the context of national trends and directions within women's studies. She focused on some areas (funding and faculty, for example, in 4-year colleges and universities) and excluded others (community colleges, for example) entirely.

The eight new monographs take up some of the questions Howe explored; they also initiate explorations of untouched areas. All are concerned primarily with higher education.

Each monograph reviews literature relevant to its focus produced during this first decade of women's studies. Each also attempts to provide definition to a field in the process of development, a complex interdisciplinary area of scholarship and curriculum that is also a strategy for educational change. Beyond definition, each monograph recommends research essential for the future development of women's studies and important to educational research more broadly.

While producing these eight monographs, the researchers met for 2 days to compare perspectives and conclusions. As a group, we agreed to offer four formal recommendations to the National Institute of Education and to all other Federal agencies and private foundations that might pursue and support research and development in women's studies.

1. The need for future monographs. We recognize the importance of continuing the development of information about relatively unexplored aspects of women's studies. Among those aspects that need examination, the following are especially important:

   a. Graduate programs and graduate education in women's studies.

   b. Schools of education and women's studies activities.

   c. Women's studies in the elementary and secondary schools.

   d. Noncredit curriculum development in women's centers, continuing education for women, and community-based centers.

2. The need for a data base on women's studies. All eight monographs recommend the development of a data base on women's studies as a necessary prelude to research design and activity. Since women's studies has developed in different ways and at different rates on almost all campuses throughout the country, such a data base must be longitudinal in design. While we are recommending its development in higher education, such a data base eventually will need to be extended to all areas of education. We recommend that annual updates be built into the data base to ensure its proper maintenance and continued usefulness.

3. The qualifications of research personnel in women's studies. We believe that the distinctive and complex nature of women's studies, as well as the fact that it is still a developing field, makes it essential that researchers be thoroughly informed about

women's studies and be prepared to involve women's studies practitioners in every aspect of research design and process. We are hopeful that NIE and other Federal agencies, private foundations, and research institutions will place responsibility for research in women's studies in the hands of those experienced and knowledgeable about the area.

4. Considerations significant to evaluation research and methodology. We believe that the evaluation of women's studies in higher education will be an important activity of the coming decade. Such evaluation will serve the researcher interested in the processes of changing higher education, as well as those charged with administering institutions. Such evaluation should, on principle, also clearly serve the developmental needs of women's studies programs, engaging them in the design and processes of research, as well as in the determination of the uses to which research will be put. Evaluations should be conducted onsite, with the cooperation of program participants, and within a framework of longitudinal data about that program and others nationally. Researchers and evaluators should be sensitive to the work of the National Women's Studies Association in this regard, and its activities serving the needs of women's studies programs.

Detailed, further recommendations appear in each of the eight monographs.

We wish to express our appreciation to the National Institute of Education for pursuing this

research, and particularly to C.B. Crump, who directed the Women's Studies Planning Studies project.

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SUMMARY

In perhaps no other educational setting -- elementary school, high school, or college -- does women's studies have the potential for affecting the lives of so vast a cross-section of American women (and therefore furthering the aims of the current women's movement) as it does in the more than 1,200 community and junior colleges (CJCs) throughout the Nation.

Over the last 10 years, the resurgence of the women's movement has contributed to a significant increase in the number of women in higher education and has resulted, nationally, in the establishment of over 300 women's studies programs and many thousands of women's studies courses. There is growing evidence that these courses can have an important and beneficial impact in helping women in the transformation of attitude and perspective fundamental to their achieving new roles in society.

No where have the changes been so dramatic as in the community and junior colleges. In these institutions, enrollment of female part-time students -- many of them "older," in different stages of their lives, and with different purposes and needs than those of previous students -- has risen 19 percent in the last 2 years, while general enrollment has decreased. Since 45 percent of all women in public higher education are now enrolled in community and junior colleges, the role of women's studies courses can be a crucial one, and it becomes of first importance to know the extent of these courses in the CJCs and how they function to help students achieve their particular goals.

A survey of both formal and informal information sources revealed almost no published data, either descriptive or evaluative, concerning women's studies courses at these colleges. There are studies of women's programs (often an umbrella term for differing

varieties of skills, services, and course offerings) and women's re-entry programs, but almost no data from which an overall picture can be garnered either of the 53 identified women's studies programs or of women's studies courses, whose number cannot even be estimated.

Because of the enormous diversity of CJCs and the present dearth of information about women's studies courses, much information is needed before definitive recommendations can be made. Nevertheless, on the basis of what published data exist and information collected from practitioners, it is recommended that NIE and other agencies concerned with postsecondary education:

1. Enunciate a clear policy of support for women's studies at the CJCs as an integral part of the national effort and commitment of the Federal Government to helping American women achieve educational and social equality. This will mean an examination of other programs with similar purpose and the inclusion of women's studies in those that are appropriate.

2. Support a national study to collect comprehensive statistical data concerning the extent and the nature of women's studies at the CJCs, as well as demographic data concerning the students who enroll in these courses. It is also recommended that agencies such as the National Center for Education Statistics regularly collect data on women's studies courses and enrollment.

3. Fund an indepth study, preferably through site visits and along the lines of Howe's Seven Years Later, of the needs of CJCs of different kinds and

purposes in establishing women's studies courses and programs to meet the range of students' needs.

4. Evaluate the impact of CJC women's studies courses on students, faculty, administration, and the surrounding community, and especially the extent to which women's studies courses have helped students achieve their particular educational goals.

5. Support such "capacity-building" projects as a national clearinghouse where information and curriculum models for women's studies courses at the CJCs can be collected and disseminated. Of particular importance are networks among practitioners and faculty development programs such as special summer workshops and other training opportunities.

6. Through a team of consultants knowledgeable about community colleges, make available to those seeking to establish or maintain women's studies courses or programs technical assistance concerning both public and private sources of support for women's studies and provide assistance in learning how to approach these sources and submit proposals.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In perhaps no other educational setting -- elementary school, high school, or 4-year college and university -- does women's studies have the potential for affecting the lives of so vast a cross-section of American women, and thereby furthering the aims of the current women's movement, as it does in the more than 1,200 community and junior colleges in the United States.

It is almost 15 years since the beginning of the current phase of what is called the women's movement. So pervasive and powerful an impact has this resurgence of women's quest for different options for their lives had that the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education has declared it the "second most fundamental revolution in the affairs of mankind" (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973). Already it has affected many aspects of our daily lives, and, coupled with other changes in social and economic conditions, all indications suggest that these effects will be even more far-reaching in the future. Moreover, by beginning to change their ideas about themselves and about what their lives could and should be, and by vastly expanding the definition of "their place" to reach almost every aspect of human activity, women have begun to challenge both the assumptions and the operations of many of our basic social institutions.

One of the most important results of these changes has been the challenge they have presented to American higher education. Women, seeing education as one of the major channels through which they can achieve a new role in society, have begun enrolling in institutions of higher education in unprecedented numbers. By 1978, women constituted more than half of the entering freshmen in postsecondary institutions in the United States (Chronicle of Higher Education, January 1979). Not only have women increasingly

been enrolling in schools, they have also begun to challenge the nature of the education provided -- both its content and its process -- in terms of its relevance to their lives and the extent to which it aids them in acquiring what is necessary for them to assume a truly equal role in American society.

To the challenge of the women's movement, American higher education has responded with what is probably one of the most interesting and important developments in its long history: the establishment of women's studies courses on campuses throughout the Nation. These courses -- established initially as an intellectual challenge to the way many disciplines traditionally have been taught, as a means of correcting their bias and deficiencies regarding women, and as a way of presenting alternative information about women not otherwise available -- have grown enormously in number in the last 10 years.

At the present time, there are over 301 American campuses reporting women's studies programs, and many thousands of different women's studies courses are being taught both on these campuses and many others (Women's Studies Newsletter VI, No. 4). Although these courses were begun as a means of correcting the deficiencies of the traditional curriculum, there is an increasing body of evidence that they do considerably more than this (Del Ray and Russell, 1978; Project WELD, 1977; Elovson and Cockcroft, 1979; Ruble et al., 1975; Scott and Wade, 1977). Helping women to understand the historical, economic, and social determinants of their present condition enables them to acquire a new perspective of themselves and other women, and appears to have had extensive and beneficial impact on many aspects of their lives.

How women's studies courses affect students who take them is discussed extensively in other papers in this series, and the reader is urged to consult these. For purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to say

that the evidence is growing that women's studies courses can be expected to function as an important change agent in the lives of both the men and women who take them. Thus, women's studies on American campuses can be seen simultaneously as an effect of the women's movement and as a cause of its future and immediate impact on American women.

Perhaps no other institutions of postsecondary education have experienced as many changes and challenges over the past decade as have the community and junior colleges. Because of these changes, particularly in the student population, the impact of women's studies in these institutions can be particularly powerful, affecting the lives of vast numbers of women. It is therefore important to examine what is known about women's studies in the community colleges and to consider what needs to be done to further their impact.

2. CHANGES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE POPULATION

Traditionally, the community college student has been a young person (usually under 21) living at home and attending school full-time. His (this student more often was male than female) educational goals generally involved transferring to a 4-year college or acquiring the skills for an entry-level vocational position upon completion of the 2-year degree.

This picture of the "typical student," which emerged in the 1960s and is still guiding much community college programming (Knoell, 1976), has undergone a number of crucial changes. There have been important and dramatic shifts in the sex ratio of students attending community colleges, in the ages of these students, in their attendance patterns, in the purposes for which they attend, and in their particular educational needs.

Changes in Male/Female Ratio

As in the 4-year institutions, there has been an increasing shift in the ratio of males to females attending community colleges. According to the 1979 Community, Junior, and Technical College Directory published by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, enrollment has dropped in both male part-time and full-time enrollment, while female enrollment in both these categories has increased. In 1977, for the first time, women students at community colleges outnumbered men. In that year, they comprised 51 percent of the community college population, up from 45 percent in 1975.

Additional data included in the 1979 directory show that the increase in the number of women students is continuing despite a slight decrease in total community college enrollment from 1977 to 1978. Inspection of the data reveals that the most striking change in the community college enrollment patterns

are occurring among part-time female students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, this population increased 19.0 percent in 2 years -- from 1,006,933 in 1975 to 1,270,087 in 1977. Not only has the number of women in 2-year colleges increased greatly, but in 1978, 45 percent of all American women enrolled in public education were in the community and junior colleges. These same sources also record an increase in the number of women from minority groups.

Changes in the Ages of Students

The change in male/female ratio has been accompanied by a change in the ages of students who are attending community colleges. Based on a study of 10 institutions, Eliason (1977) found that only 60 percent of her sample of women students were under 21 and attending college full-time. The other 40 percent were over 21 and attending either full- or part-time. Three of the colleges in the sample had only students under age 21. It may be that a systematic sample designed to establish age ratio might show these percentages to be more equal or even greater for older students.

Changing Goals Among Students

A number of studies have shown that the women now enrolled in community colleges are an extremely diverse group with educational goals and needs quite different from those of the previous population of community college students (Anderson, 1977; Chamberlain, 1971; and Moore, 1975). Study after study shows that these women are at many different stages of their lives. For example, in a study conducted at Fresno City College (Richards, 1974), the population consisted of single women in their twenties and thirties, mostly divorced or separated, married women in their twenties and thirties with children at home, and married women in their thirties and forties whose children were 14 or older.

Studies such as that of Knoell (1976) and Eliason (1977) indicate that these older, part-time, female students often have educational goals quite different from the traditional ones of grades, degrees, and eventual transfer. For example, 41 percent of the women students interviewed by Eliason desired immediate employment after graduation. The comprehensive study of women students done by the California Community and Junior College Association (1978) also showed employment as the most common educational goal: 74 percent of their on-campus respondents cited "being employed" when asked what they saw themselves doing in the next 5 years. In the Richards' (1974) study too, the majority of separated, divorced, and married women in their twenties and thirties were generally seeking careers, with a smaller percentage (25 percent) citing personal fulfillment. In Eliason's study, only 23 percent gave the traditional and expected response of community college students: transferring to a 4-year institution.

Changing Patterns of Needs in Students

The studies of Eliason (1977, 1978), Richards (1974), Moore (1974), and CCJCA (1978, 1979) have reported that women enrolled today in community colleges bring with them an entirely different range of needs than did earlier students with respect to the successful achievement of educational goals. Many of these women doubt their ability to attend school successfully, and they need special developmental courses, often in basic skills. Many seem to need at least one semester of orientation to the school situation as a whole before they can begin to apply themselves effectively to their studies.

It has also been found that the counseling received by these women often is not suited to their particular needs; they need counselors who are aware of their particular histories and present outlooks and who are both sensitive to their apprehensions and skillful in conveying to them the range of

their expanding options (Anderson, 1977). These new students need child care so that they can attend classes, and they need a variety of support services, special curricula, and more flexible scheduling. Above all, they need help in restructuring their ideas and expectations about themselves and their futures, in acquiring a different image of women and women's potential, in deepening their understanding of the social and historical forces that have shaped their lives, and in understanding what possibilities are opening to them and how they can make the most of these.

In sum, researchers working in this area have found an intensely varied group of women, vastly different from those who traditionally attended community colleges, whose goals are being shaped by new visions of women's possibilities. These women represent a cross-section of the American women who are seeking new options for themselves and who are turning to the community colleges for help in realizing them.

Beyond the Data

Beyond the sheer numbers of women who are turning to the community colleges to effect some change in their lives, there are several factors characteristic of this greatly diversified group of women that must be recognized; factors that greatly increase the importance of women's studies at the community college level.

It is probably safe to say that most American women, owing to their still largely traditional socialization, could profit greatly from the opportunity that women's studies courses present to develop their understanding of their current social role and their ideas about themselves and other women. Such an experience may be especially important for the women who are now enrolling in the community colleges.

Because these women are drawn from so many different segments of our society, many of them are likely to be more "traditional"; women who may not have had much previous exposure to the ideas of the women's movement and to the material presented in women's studies courses. For these women, the women's studies courses offered at the community colleges may be their first and only opportunity to consider such ideas and their relevance to their lives. Often, these are the women who have <u>least</u> planned for profound changes in their lives, especially during middle age, and they need considerable support and help in dealing with the changes they are experiencing.

In addition, as numerous studies have stressed, many women in community and junior colleges are at a crucial decision point in their lives, especially regarding occupational and vocational decisions. (In Eliason's study, over 40 percent reported such concerns to be of immediate importance to them.) To help these women "transform their perspectives" (Mezirow and Rose, 1978) and choose vocations and directions they otherwise might not have considered, more than access to nontraditional training and counseling is needed. These women need the opportunity to experience and come to terms with ideas and information that enable them to reshape their understanding of themselves and of other women: to understand the roots of their present lives and how larger social issues have shaped their experiences. To attain the self-confidence and improved self-concept needed to take advantage of new opportunities, they need a deepened understanding of themselves as women in society.

The growing number of studies of returning women students makes it apparent that community colleges are becoming increasingly important as a means for American women from all walks of life and in all stages of their lives to improve their social and economic roles in society. When women consider

returning to school -- whether to gain new or improved occupational skills, to undertake a complete change of career, to complete their education, or for personal development -- a vast number of them think first and only of the 2-year colleges in their community. It is quite safe to say, since they themselves say it so often, that without these colleges, where they feel their needs are recognized and responded to and where efforts are made to provide the kinds of help they most need, most of them would never consider returning to school. For many, the community college will be the only place they go, if they go any place at all.

Because the women who are presently enrolling in community colleges represent such a diversified cross-section of American women, the women's studies courses at these colleges take on considerable importance. Given this, it is essential that we begin to identify what is known about women's studies at the community college level, how it is serving these students, and how these courses can be supported to help these women meet the demands of their lives.

3. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In attempting to determine what is presently known about women's studies courses in the community and in the junior colleges, we were particularly interested in learning what data were available concerning enrollments; the type, extent, and distribution of women's studies courses; who is teaching and who is taking these courses; and what work has been done to assess their impact on students, to identify obstacles to their establishment, and to assist in the development of high-quality offerings.

Formal Sources

We began with a computer search of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) data base and a survey of what information concerning women's studies in the community colleges was available from a number of other sources and organizations. Among these sources were:

The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges
The American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges
Women's Educational Equity Communications Network (1977, 1978)
American Association for Higher Education
National Center for Education Statistics
Current Index to Periodical Literature
The Institution for Research in Community Colleges
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Dissertation Abstracts
Center for Adult Education, Teachers College, Columbia University
The California Commission on Community Colleges
Women's Studies Newsletter
The National Women's Studies Association Newsletter

The Community College Caucus of the NWSA
The American Council on Education
The Educational Testing Service
Newsletters of the American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges

Our review of these sources made it apparent that it was necessary to distinguish between the "women's programs," "women's re-entry programs," "women's studies programs," and "women's studies courses." Rather than impose our own definitions or those of other writers (Robinson, 1973), we relied on definitions that emerged from the usage of researchers and practitioners in this area.

"Women's programs," as defined in the 1976 founding statement of the Western Division of the American Association of Women in the Community and Junior Colleges and in the 1977 survey of the California Community and Junior College Association Commission on Women, are "any service provided for women students (e.g. courses, center, and other support services, programs...)." The term "women's re-entry programs" refers to those programs "especially organized to assist women who are returning either to continue their education or to enter or re-enter the job market after an extended hiatus" (Mezirow et al., 1976). Re-entry programs typically encompass such services as counseling and referral, coping skills (both academic and interpersonal), testing, support groups, women's centers, and modified institutional requirements and educational methods, as well as such specialized services as child care, remedial instruction, and job placement. (See Hersh, 1980, for a discussion of women's re-entry programs.)

"Women's studies programs" is used in two very different ways: (1) to refer to groups of courses that include both academic, for-credit classes and classes focused on the development of particular skills or aimed at providing services of special

interest to women; and (2) for sequences of credit-bearing academic courses only. The latter is the more frequently used. The term "women's studies courses" also encompasses both credit-bearing classroom offerings in one or more disciplines "taught from a feminist perspective" (such as History of Women, Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective, Psychology of Women) and various skills and service offerings (Self-Defense, How to Have a Job Interview, Peer-Counseling). The former is the more frequent usage, and the one that is followed by this paper.

Lack of Quantitative Data

For a variety of reasons, none of the sources previously listed could provide us with descriptive statistical data on the number of community and junior colleges offering either women's studies courses or programs. Likewise, these sources did not yield information on enrollments, types of courses, types of students taking them, and how enrollment in women's studies courses is associated with any kind of outcome measure.

Neither NCES nor the AACJC gather data specifically on women's studies courses. NCES can provide enrollment data for community and junior colleges in terms of male/female ratio and by field, but women's studies is not recognized as a major field; thus, the statistics from the other areas could not be used even indirectly to extrapolate the data. Nor does the AACJC collect such data in their extensive yearly surveys.

NCES staff suggested that individual institutions collected these data by course and would report them to State associations. However, we found that, for California, this was not true; no State-level commission on community and junior colleges collected such information. And although the Office of Affirmative Action Programs for the California Community Colleges had just initiated a survey to collect data on women's programs and women's centers in the State

of California, the survey included only one question on women's studies that asked if the community college offered any course that might be described as a women's studies course.

It is possible that data on women's studies courses could be compiled by examining the community and junior college catalogs at the AACJC library in Washington. However, such examination likely would not yield dependable data, since these catalogs often do not list noncredit courses and courses given off campus. Moreover, it is quite difficult to tell from a course title (Images of Women in the Bible, Women Poets in the Twentieth Century) whether or not it is a women's studies course, much less determine with any certainty if a course is being taught "from a feminist perspective." Likewise, although it might be possible to get some idea of how many community colleges offer women's studies courses by examining the community college membership of the NWSA, such data would be tentative at best and extremely unreliable.

One of the few sources of quantitative data concerning women's studies courses in the community colleges is the April 1979 Women's Studies Newsletter (WSN), which provides a compilation by the NWSA and the Feminist Press of all identified women's studies programs at both 2-year and 4-year colleges. Of the 301 programs listed, 53 are in community colleges. However, it is difficult to regard even these data as definitive for several reasons. For one, the definition of women's studies program and course varies significantly from institution to institution. Moreover, responses to letters sent to each of the 53 community colleges requesting information about their women's studies programs and courses revealed that a number of the programs either no longer existed or had been so drastically changed that their inclusion in the WSN list was questionable. Further, the WSN listing was composed of institutions that had identified themselves as having women's studies programs. There is, at present, no listing

that we could identify of all the community and junior colleges that offer women's studies courses.

Another problem centers around the fact that, at the time of the WSN compilation, no women's studies programs had been reported at private 2-year institutions. This does not necessarily mean that no private 2-year institutions offer any women's studies courses. An examination of a score of catalogs at the offices of the AACJC revealed that at least half of these private colleges have at least one course whose title suggests some special concern with women's issues. Again, however, it would be difficult to determine if these courses (or, indeed, others whose titles might not suggest it) are being taught "from a feminist perspective."

Articles That Focus on Needs and Problems

Our computer search of the ERIC data base yielded abstracts on 11 articles written between 1972 and 1977, as well as a handful of dissertation abstracts, that had some relevance to women's studies and community colleges. These articles and abstracts were concerned primarily with the surge in enrollments of part-time women students, individual institutions' surveys of the needs articulated by women attending their colleges, psychological profiles of these women, the problems of attracting women to technical careers, and the problems of counseling re-entering women students.

The computer search also provided abstracts for some 16 indirectly relevant articles. In examining these articles, we found that it is often difficult to determine the content of an article from its title. For example, an article entitled "Women in Community Colleges: A Profile" (Brawer, 1977) dealt exclusively with the problems of instructors at the community college level.

Most of the articles reviewed, especially the psychological profiles of women students at the community colleges, argued persuasively for the need for women's studies at the community college level. Three articles focused on establishing the need for women's studies courses at the community college level: "Women's Studies in the Community College Curriculum" (Hursey, 1978); "Women's Studies at the Community College" (Rubaii, 1978); and "Women's Programs in Community Colleges: Who Needs Them?" (Bulpitt, 1977). None provided quantitative data on what is occurring in women's studies at these colleges.

The Hursey article defined the purpose of women's studies as: "to correct academic concepts and thus alter the way people think about themselves." It discussed the problems of setting up a women's studies program and finding teachers and textbooks, and then compared successful and unsuccessful programs. However, it dealt with programs in 4-year colleges rather than in 2-year institutions. Rubaii looked to changing enrollments in community colleges, and gave evidence that 2-year institutions are in an excellent position to provide women's studies programs. Bulpitt also stressed the need to design community college programs for a new population of women, particularly re-entry women, but only two paragraphs described some of the women's studies courses developed during the seventies in community colleges. Bulpitt's article appeared in the spring 1977 edition of Community College Frontiers, an issue devoted entirely to the subject of women in community colleges. This issue contains several pertinent articles on the need for women's studies and women's programs and on the beneficial impact of women's studies on students, but it provides no hard data on women's studies at the CJC or on how well those needs are being met.

We found only one article, by Nichols et al. (1976), in these published formal sources that dealt quantitatively with women's programs in the community

colleges. This article reports on a 1974 mail survey, sent to the deans of students of all public community colleges in the United States, that sought to discover what kinds of programs and services were being provided for female students and community members.

Nichols reported that slightly over half of the 577 responding colleges offered credit courses and/or noncredit experiences designed for and about women. He also reported that, in the category of "specialized courses," the "largest single discipline represented was in the field of literature." However, only 19 percent of the respondents reported such courses, and only 12 percent reported courses in psychology, sociology, and history.

Limited as the Nichols data are, the study is one of the few attempts to describe in statistical terms the extent of women's studies in the community colleges. The remainder of the survey focuses on areas of program design, funding, the availability of women's resource centers, community school relationships, publicity, the degree of concern for women, and the need for a national clearinghouse for women's programs in community colleges. Interestingly, more than half the respondents believe that a national clearinghouse of this kind would be helpful.

Informal Sources

Although we were unable to identify any published articles that yielded data specifically concerning those questions about women's studies in the community colleges with which we began our search, it would be a mistake to conclude that no data on this topic exist. Our search for information led us to contact a number of prominent and active practitioners involved in women's studies at the community college level, particularly members of the California Community and Junior College Association, the Community College Caucus of the NWSA, the American Association of

Community and Junior Colleges, and the American Association of Women in Community Colleges. Through them, we learned of a 1977 survey by CCJCA's Commission on Women of its member colleges and of Mezirow et al.'s 1976 national survey of women's re-entry programs in the community colleges.

In the CCJCA survey, 84 percent of the colleges responding reported at least one course "with an emphasis on women...most commonly...in the areas of English, history, counseling, physical education, psychology, and 18 other disciplines" that, puzzlingly, included a listing for "Women's Studies." Although this study was the most organized and thorough we encountered, it still did not enable us to determine just how many of these "specialized courses" could be defined as women's studies or how the courses listed as "Women's Studies" differed from the others.

Mezirow's 1976 National Inventory of Women's Programs in Community and Junior Colleges, conducted from the Center for Adult Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, surveyed the then 1,172 member institutions of the AACJC. The inventory lists colleges providing programs especially designed to assist women returning to education. However, neither these listings nor the subsequent comprehensive field studies of these programs, on which Mezirow and Rose based their excellent manual for program evaluation, offered data regarding the extent and nature of women's studies programs and courses.

A final source of data is the files of instructors throughout the country who have kept records about their women's studies courses. Through one person after the other, one hears of various incipient collections begun or accumulating in different places. However, time and resource constraints have prohibited these faculty from collecting, organizing, and disseminating these data.

In 1976, Eileen Rossi, in her excellent article describing how community colleges have responded to the challenge of the women's movement, wrote that: "educators have shockingly little data by which to measure their progress (since) no group or individual has assumed leadership for organizing a comprehensive body of accessible information." In many ways, her comments, and especially her observations regarding research done to evaluate the role of community colleges in meeting the needs of the new women students, seem as appropriate in 1979 as they were in 1976.

In sum, our survey of both formal and informal sources of information about women's studies in the community colleges yielded almost no data of the kind we sought. There is still a dearth of organized information in this area, and the need for such data grows increasingly acute.

4. SOME VIEWS FROM THE FIELD

In the course of preparing this monograph, we sent letters of inquiry to the 53 community colleges listed in the Women's Studies Newsletter as having women's studies programs. These letters solicited information regarding each college's program, such as: how long they had had courses, and how many were typically offered each semester; what had made the program possible, and what had been the major obstacles to the establishment of the program; what kinds of help would have been most useful when the couses were first being initiated, and what kinds would be most useful now; who taught women's studies courses, and what kinds of help had they needed in developing these courses; to what extent the governing structure of the institution had affected the ease with which women's studies courses could be offered; and what the respondents thought the goals of women's studies should be on their campus.

Responses from 15* of these 53 colleges (28 percent) were received in time to be included in this paper. In addition, we conducted interviews both by

*City College of San Francisco, CA; College of Marin, CA; Cuesla College, CA; Hartwell, CA; Henry Ford Community College, MI; Kapiolani, Hawaii; Lansing Community College, MI; Lower Columbia College, WA; Metropolitan Community College, MI; Ohlone College, CA; Oscar Rose Community College, N.Y.; Suomi College, MI; and two Texas colleges.

telephone and in person with prominent practitioners** in the community colleges who are presently active or who had been instrumental in the establishment of women's studies courses in their colleges. Although the number of these respondents is relatively small (it was not among the purposes of these monographs to conduct surveys or to gather new data), because of the interesting and thought-provoking responses received from these experienced, knowledgeable, and active practitioners, their comments and recommendations are summarized below.

What Makes Courses Possible

There were significant differences in the sizes, locales, student bodies served, types of colleges, and numbers and kinds of women's studies courses offered at the respondents' institutions, and even greater differences among the respondents themselves. Nevertheless, there was a surprising consensus in their answers to several of our questions.

**Mary-Ann Augustinovich, women's studies coordinator, San Francisco City College; Dr. Marjorie Blaha, vice provost, Evergreen Valley College, San Jose, CA; Dr. Mildred Bulpitt, Maricopa County Community College District, Phoenix, AZ; Carol Eliason, director, Center for Women's Opportunities, American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Washington, DC; Grace Mitchell, Commission on Women, Consumnes River College, Sacramento, CA; Dr. A. Rae Price, editor, American Association of Women in the Community and Junior Colleges Newsletter, Kansas City, MO; Dr. Eileen Rossi, founding member, American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges, San Francisco, CA; and Sandra Rubaii, chair, Community College Caucus of the National Women's Studies Association, Tompkins-Courtland College, NY.

Among these was the question concerning factors that made it possible for courses to be established on their campuses. Almost every respondent mentioned the overwhelming importance of faculty who are willing and able to teach these courses, who will push for these courses and will work long and hard to develop them and get them adopted. Also mentioned frequently was the desire of administrators to attract students, especially when coupled with student demand and community interest and pressure. Student demand, and particularly student organized efforts, were cited less frequently than the other two factors, although the great impact that this can have was noted. Also cited were the initiative of a program developer, input from a community advisory committee, strong support in every way from the administration, and the availability of good curriculum materials.

There was considerably more variety in the descriptions of obstacles to the establishment of women's studies courses. Respondents described encountering resistance from the administration, from other departments that felt a proprietary interest in particular courses and that competed for their control, and from departments that objected to the establishment of these courses within the department in which they were to be taught. One respondent reported what she detected as "internalized reluctance," doubts, and hesitation even by those who were among the most vocal proponents of the courses.

The specific attitudinal resistance described centered around these courses as "ancillary" -- as not really necessary and as tending to proliferate courses without any real justification. Other types of objections reported were that the courses were not a "valid" part of the curriculum; that since they involved "nontraditional instructional methods and even counseling," they were not "quality educational offerings."

Financial obstacles were mentioned more as a problem in maintaining the courses (especially in the wake of Proposition 13 for the California colleges), rather than as an obstacle to their establishment. Several felt that financial objections served as a screen for other resistances. Others mentioned that even when financial issues were raised, the courses were established without problems once it had been demonstrated that there was sufficient enrollment to fill them.

In general, it was "the conservatism of administration" that resulted in a lack of support and a lack of subsequent growth for women's studies courses. At only one rural institution was the absence of women faculty interested in and capable of teaching mentioned as an obstacle. One respondent reported no obstacles at all.

Kinds of Assistance Needed

Several common threads were found among the answers given to the questions concerning the kinds of help and instructors needed to establish and maintain women's studies courses. Whether they spoke of the past or the present, whether they were new women's studies coordinators or administrators with a lifetime of experience in community colleges, respondents uniformly and emphatically stressed the importance of access to curriculum materials "to keep from reinventing the wheel." Whether it was referred to as a "clearinghouse for curriculum materials" or a "network for finding out what others had done," the need for course outlines, audio-visual materials, bibliographies, and knowing what others had developed and presently were offering were mentioned repeatedly. Likewise, the need for a knowledge of what resources exist and for a systematic and dependable way of obtaining access to them was mentioned by almost every respondent.

Second only to the wish for a network or clearinghouse for resources and materials and for more contact among colleges with such courses was the need for consultants or a team of advisors to whom those seeking to establish courses could turn. Several respondents suggested that this might be made possible through a community college commission liaison person at the State level or through direct Federal assistance. These consultants were seen as senior people knowledgeable in administrative complexities who could be asked to confer with key people at an institution about the establishment and development of women's studies courses.

Respondents also cited the need for marketing advice; help in identifying the women to whose attention these courses should be directed; separate budgets; expressions of student support; grant monies or other sources of financial support so that the courses could be offered without cost to women; other supportive faculty, preferably "dynamic and inspiring instructors willing and able to teach women's studies courses"; the commitment and support of key administrators "straight on up the line"; the creation of bilingual materials; the expansion of options for minority women; and help in broadening courses into disciplines other than English. Some indicated that they would appreciate even a small amount of clerical help or even a half-time position on campus to make their women's studies program a "legitimate" one.

Role of Instructors and Governance Structure

The answers were also strikingly consistent to the question concerning who teaches women's studies courses. For the most part, instructors are the women who had the commitment and expertise to develop the courses and to push for them. Very few of the respondents reported more than one or two full-time regular faculty involved in teaching these courses. Many others reported that the instructors were largely part-time faculty, with special background, who

were brought in to teach particular courses. One respondent mentioned that among the part-time instructors were those who needed jobs and who might or might not be committed to women's studies.

In response to the question regarding what kinds of help these instructors needed when developing their courses, again, a clearinghouse of resources and an information and contact network were the most frequent responses. Special training for those who were to be women's studies instructors, either through faculty development programs or through summer institutes and other special workshops, were mentioned as still being needed. Support by the administration and departmental colleagues was cited as a further need.

One respondent mentioned that course development had not been so great a problem as "teaching the courses within a sexist environment, where women's studies instructors are identified as 'libbers.'" Another respondent reported that, at her college, no help had been needed in first developing courses: sessions held among instructors in which course outlines were presented and in which both instructors and students gave input, suggestions, and support had proved sufficient.

Answers concerning the extent to which the governing structure of the institution affected the ease with which courses had been established ranged from "it hasn't" through "little" to "enormous - totally!" Some respondents described substantial support -- being able to substitute regular departmental courses for women's studies courses in a normal teaching load, to build excellent libraries, to acquire films, and, where courses were permitted, "to proceed although under-enrolled." Others reported considerable frustration caused by "layers and layers of administration," and "too many committees." One experienced administrator suggested that those who develop courses and wish to get them established need to have help in understanding the policies and complexities of the administrative structure and process.

Whether they described facilitation or frustration, almost all respondents seemed to feel that the type of governing structure had been a significant factor in establishing or preventing the establishment of these courses.

Goals of Women's Studies Courses

In response to our inquiry regarding what the goals of women's studies should be, the answers ranged from the exalted to the pragmatic; from making fundamental changes in all of society to getting jobs; from getting through life to surviving the courses themselves.

Although the goals and needs of the community college population are considered and recognized as primarily vocationally oriented and practical, it is most decidedly not the view of these practitioners that the goals of women's studies courses in these colleges be so limited. Although none of the respondents lost sight of these concerns in the lives of the students, many of them expressed goals for women's studies courses that went much further.

Among these other goals were to educate and raise the consciousness of both men and women about the roots of sex roles in life and society, and to make them aware of the possibilities of change, refinement, and a combination of these roles for both men and women, bearing in mind that "most come from traditional backgrounds." Others felt it essential to help students learn about women's histories and accomplishments, to develop in them a new sense of women's potential and to motivate them to achieve it. One respondent sought to help women become social change agents themselves. She stressed that, while it was important to help women choose new and nontraditional occupations, it was "not enough just to change the sex of the bodies who are doing these jobs, without changing what's in their heads."

Another frequently mentioned purpose of women's studies was to provide good courses with good academic content -- courses that would give students a wider look at various disciplines and provide sound academic preparation for transfer to 4-year colleges. Many respondents mentioned the importance of exposing students to a feminist perspective in literature, the arts, the humanities, and history, as well as of stressing present choices and focusing on what women need to do now to avail themselves of new opportunities.

One respondent articulated a four-fold goal for women's studies on her campus: to prepare women for employment and re-entry; to help them enhance their life management skills, as well as their employability and upward mobility; to create a support network among individual women and agencies concerned with serving them; and to make it possible for the college "to respond creatively and flexibly to expressed needs in the community."

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Our survey of data sources and our interviews and questionnaires highlight the serious absence of data on almost all facets of women's studies at the community and junior colleges and point to the need for a great amount of work regarding this issue. The recommendations presented in this section represent only a starting point for further investigation.

These recommendations are by no means definitive, nor can they be in light of the current situation. The very fact of the absence of data means that many recommendations cannot be made until some initial data gathering has been done and the results examined. Additionally, because of the diversity that exists among these unique American 2-year institutions in their histories, structures, philosophies, locales, resources, and the nature and needs of their student bodies, any recommendations presented, especially at this point, can only be preliminary. However, there are several steps that need to and can, even now, be taken to gather information and to meet those needs that have already been clearly and unequivocally expressed.

Articulate National Policy of Support

As a first step, it is essential that the National Institute of Education and other Federal agencies clearly acknowledge the increasingly crucial role of community colleges in helping vast numbers of American women from all segments of society achieve better lives for themselves. Available evidence suggests that, in response to a host of economic and social factors, the number of women enrolling in community colleges will continue to grow. Such factors include the growing acceptance of and need for women to seek paid employment outside the home, and the search by these women for interesting, meaningful, and well-paying work in which their talents and their

needs for independence and self-sufficiency can be fulfilled. National recognition of the crucial role of both community colleges and women's studies in helping women requires: (1) the establishment of a clear policy of Federal support for these courses at these colleges; (2) the implementation of a two-pronged program of data gathering and research; and (3) the support of capacity-building projects to implement this policy.

However, it should be stressed that a national policy of support should not be justified solely on the fact that women's studies courses make it easier for women to expand their vocational aspirations and direct themselves into new areas of work. As we have seen, occupational and practical goals are not the only ones sought by those who have worked so hard to establish these courses and those who are presently teaching them. Rather, this support should be based on the fact that, if any substantial portion of American women are going to re-think their definitions of themselves, if they are going to come to understand their personal lives as part of a larger historical picture, and if they themselves are to play some part in re-defining and expanding the role of women in American society, it will be only with help from women's studies courses at the community colleges. For many, it will be only the 2-year colleges that expose them to feminist concepts basic to "transforming their perspectives."

The issue is larger than simply jobs. Among the many different functions that community colleges have served since they were first established, a new one is now coming to the fore: that of a critical force in the achievement of educational and social equity for a vast number of American women from many different walks of life.

One of the implications of this recommendation is that funds for women's studies be included, to whatever extent possible, as an integral part of the many

federally funded vocational programs at the community, junior, and technical colleges. The extent to which these programs, coupled with women's studies courses, are more effective than those offered without them should be one topic toward which research is directed.

Collect Basic Statistical Data

There is a need for a large-scale, basic statistical study (or studies) to collect reliable and comprehensive data concerning the nature and extent of women's studies at community colleges. As we have seen, currently there is almost no information on this topic, and one would be hard put to find answers, on a national level, even to such basic questions as: How many 2-year institutions throughout the country have courses in women's studies? How many courses do these colleges usually give? What kinds of courses are these? What fields are they in? Are these courses in departments of their own, or are they new courses developed within already existing departments? What types of structures are these?

Still other questions that need to be answered include: How many students take these courses? Who are the students who take these courses, and why do they take them? How many courses do they take? Are there any differences between students who take these courses and those who do not? Who teaches these courses, and how were they selected? What kinds of linkages do these courses have with other offerings for women? How are these courses funded? How and why are they initiated?

It is strongly recommended that agencies such as the National Center for Education Statistics begin to collect such data on a regular and continuing basis and that these become part of our national data bank.

Conduct Needs Assessment Studies

One of the most important directions for research on women's studies in community colleges is toward defining the needs of women's studies programs and of those who teach women's studies courses. The basic diversity among these colleges in their philosophies, histories, student bodies, governing structures, and responsiveness and vulnerability to their communities mandate a thorough and careful study of the needs of the institucions and their instructors.

Such a study, or series of studies, must include as broad a sample of these colleges as possible: rural and urban; transfer oriented and occupationally oriented; new institutions and long established ones; those with few students and few departments, and those with many of both. The sample should likewise include programs at various stages of development.

Survey questionnaires, combined with indepth site visits of at least several days, along the lines of Howe's Seven Years Later, should seek to establish the history of these programs, those factors that made it possible for women's studies courses to be offered, the obstacles encountered and how these were overcome, how courses were developed and evaluated, how instructors were selected, what needs there were when the programs were first begun, what needs still exist, and what the goals of women's studies courses are seen to be on each of these campuses.

Evaluate the Impact of Women's Studies

In our search of the various data banks and journal articles, we were unable to locate any studies at the community college level of what effects women's studies courses have on the lives of students who take them. Several different kinds of impact studies are needed.

There is a need for basic, exploratory, "goal-free" studies that identify and document the impact of women's studies courses on community college students, both men and women. Research is also needed on why women (and men) take women's studies courses in the community colleges and whether their expectations are fulfilled.

Of particular interest in evaluating the usefulness of women's studies in the 2-year colleges would be an investigation of possible differences in the impact of these courses on different groups of women, and, because all women's studies courses and modes of teaching are not alike, of possible differences stemming from different types of courses and different styles of instruction. It is also extremely important to examine the degree of association or correlation between taking women's studies courses and certain specific criteria such as success in nontraditional occupational training programs, grades, transfer to 4-year institutions, completion, and continued enrollment.

Also of special significance is the selection and sequence of evaluation models that are adopted for these studies. Different situations and different questions will require widely differing approaches. How this research is done will profoundly affect our understanding of the functions of women's studies at community and junior colleges and the extent to which they will find future support. Thus, considerable sophistication and care in evaluation methods must be exerted.

Provide Technical Assistance

Technical assistance in the establishment and maintenance of courses and programs is yet another need of community colleges. Again, the diversity among these colleges and the equally great diversity in the resources on which they can draw, both on their campuses and in their communities, call for technical

assistance that can respond to a wide variety of needs. Some of these needs can now be identified; many more will emerge from the research that still needs to be done.

Among the kinds of activities for which help is now being sought are needs assessments on campuses and in communities and the identification of those groups in the community that are seeking or would be supportive of women's studies courses at their community college. In the course of this study, several respondents mentioned their need for someone to turn to in establishing women's studies courses: people who had already experienced these first steps and could provide some guidance, as well as outside consultants who would be viewed as disinterested parties and who could help them present the pros and cons of such courses or programs.* Several respondents mentioned needing help in "finding their way through the morass of Federal agencies and private foundations in order to identify likely sources of funding." They mentioned needing help in "learning how to identify those who would be particularly interested in what they wanted to do and how best to approach them."

Further Areas of Consideration

Although perhaps more pertinent to the general issue of educational and social equity for women than to the specific one of women's studies in the community colleges, there is another issue that should be mentioned -- the need for help at the local level in resolving conflicting, often contradictory, and sometimes punitive regulations

*While it had been suggested that a team of outside consultants might serve as liaison persons at the State-level community college office, the kinds of assistance sought might be even better provided by staff at a central, national clearinghouse for materials and resources.

regarding State assistance for women who are attending school. This need was strongly voiced by many members of the NWSA community college caucus, and it is being mentioned in this monograph at their specific and urgent behest.

In several parts of the county, receiving certain kinds of assistance to attend classes in community and junior colleges in some cases results in decreases in the amount of State aid or welfare that women can receive to support themselves and their families. This works to discourage women in their attempts to upgrade their skills, their education, and their employability. There is clearly a need for a study of this issue on both the Federal and State levels so that the women who are among those most in need of what the community colleges can offer will not be penalized for taking advantage of these opportunities.

It has also been mentioned that there are insufficient monies in terms of loans and scholarships for part-time older and vocationally oriented women at the community colleges, and it was the explicit concern of the members of the NWSA community college caucus that national attention be directed toward this problem.

6. THE FUTURE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The multiplicity of factors that influence educational developments and the dearth of information about women's studies at the community and junior college level make it difficult to say anything definitive about the future of women's studies at these colleges. Although a much smaller percentage of 2-year colleges than 4-year colleges describe themselves as having women's studies programs (4 percent versus 14 percent), the rate of growth for reported women's studies programs during the last 2 years has been greater at the 2-year than at the 4-year schools. However, as reported earlier, even these data are quite uncertain.

Given the growing shortage of funds (best exemplified by the effects of California's Proposition 13, which has greatly reduced money for public education), and the fact that women's studies courses are sometimes seen as either ancillary or as too academic and not practical enough, continuing difficulties for the establishment and maintenance of these courses can be expected, and from more than one source. It is clear that, if women's studies at the community colleges is to survive, there is a need for considerable support from official sources along the lines indicated in the previous section.

American community colleges perform a unique educational function. "The best kept secret in higher education today is that community colleges have the talent and tools to prepare women for well paying positions in the American work force" (Eliason, 1977). Community colleges, given support for their talent and the means of availing themselves of each others' tools, can prepare American women for far more than that: they can prepare them for a new role in American society by helping them achieve educational, social, and economic equity. However, to do this,

they will need help -- both in meeting the needs that are already known and in identifying still other needs -- and they will need this help soon.

It is probably safe to say that America's community and junior colleges can do more for more American women from all aspects of our society than can any other present educational institution. This fact makes the support of women's studies at the community and junior colleges an educational issue of considerable social importance and one that must be a first priority in national educational policy.

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